

# **REWARDS AND RECOGNITION SYSTEM: AN EVALUATION**

## **EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

BY: Susan M. Tucker  
Battalion Chief  
Central Pierce Fire and Rescue  
Tacoma, WA

An applied research project submitted to the National Fire Academy  
as part of the Executive Fire Officer Program

August 1998

## **ABSTRACT**

Central Pierce Fire and Rescue's employee recognition program has indicated that its members are the single most significant factor in the success of its mission. Success, however, is not defined as manipulation for increased outputs, but as fostering creativity and innovation in order to develop a learning organization that is ready to meet change. A recognition and rewards system is one method to institutionalize this commitment and remove the fear of failure by acknowledging the contributions and efforts of people that promote the organization's mission.

CPFR has two recognition programs in place to acknowledge the accomplishments of their members that strive to bring organizational success. These programs consist of a commendation letter and an employee-of-the-quarter award. Both have been in effect for over three years with dismal or declining participation.

The efficacy of a recognition program is measured in the value of the incentives to the organization's employees. Neither of these programs have been assessed as to their effectiveness in helping CPFR fulfill its vision; therefore, evaluative methodology was utilized to determine the perceived value of these current recognition methods by its members and to identify factors that could improve satisfaction of the recognition and reward system. This was accomplished by answering the following questions:

1. Do members of CPFR desire recognition for their contributions to the organization?
2. Have the two current methods adequately distinguished those members that have made valuable contributions toward CPFR's vision and goals?
3. What is the perceived value of the current honor of these programs in the organization?

4. What methods of recognition would offer the highest satisfaction to current CPFR members?

Questions relevant to the research were incorporated into a district climate survey that was administered to all active members with CPFR by Northwest Training Group, Tacoma, WA. The data was compiled and paralleled with an extensive literature review to gain information on the perceived value of the current programs, effects of the programs, and to identify other methods of recognition that would bring satisfaction to the membership.

The results indicated that members within CPFR strongly indicated a desire for acknowledgment of their professional achievements. While there was support for the two current programs, several factors were identified as deficiencies, such as limited opportunities for recognition, lack of team recognition, favoritism, and unknown criteria for the reward. The methods of recognition most preferred were increased opportunities for growth and special training, followed by recognition received from one's immediate supervisor, and recognition among peers.

It is the recommendation of this research that CPFR expand its current recognition program to increase opportunities of acknowledgment for consistent efforts, heroic efforts, special projects, career milestones, teamwork, and creativity. Improvements to the program should stress personalized, timely rewards and recognition methods, presentation of recognition among peers, linkage of the achievement to the organization's goals and mission, increased use of symbolism and power rewards, and forming of a committee, which represents the diversity in the organization, to continuously monitor and update the recognition system.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS



	<b>PAGE</b>
Abstract.....	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
Background and Significance.....	6
Literature Review .....	9
Procedures.....	19
Results.....	23
Discussion.....	28
Recommendations.....	31
Reference List.....	32
Appendix A—Written survey.....	34
Appendix B—Results, items 13-87.....	42
Appendix C—Results, items 99-105.....	49
Appendix D—Comments, items 106 & 107.....	53
Appendix E—Overall results, items 13-105.....	59
Appendix F—Survey demographics.....	63

## INTRODUCTION

“Employees and members of Central Pierce Fire and Rescue (CPFR) are the single most significant key to our organization’s success,” is the statement utilized to define the ideology of their employee recognition program” (CPFR, personal communication, June 1994).

Currently, CPFR has adopted two instruments for recognizing its members for contributions to the organization or community that are considered above and beyond the call of duty or job role. The first is a commendation program that is included in the organization’s policy manual. According to the current executive director and the human resource coordinator, no one has been presented with a letter of commendation since the program’s adoption in March of 1995. The second instrument is an employee-of-the-quarter award that was promoted by a grass roots effort within the department and approved at about the same time as the commendation policy. In its infancy this program generated considerable participation. In recent months, however, its committee members have had to increase their campaign efforts significantly in order to get an adequate number of nominations for the award.

The effectiveness of any program, whether for recognition or reward, is judged by the value it holds as measured in its support for achieving the goals of the organization (FEMA, 1995, p. SM8-3). The two methods utilized by CPFR for recognizing its members’ contributions toward the organization’s mission have never been evaluated since their adoption. Therefore, the purpose of this research is to evaluate the current recognition methods utilized by CPFR to determine its value to the membership and to identify other factors that may improve participants’ satisfaction with these programs. This study used evaluative research to answer the following questions:

1. Do members of CPFR desire recognition for their contributions to the organization?
2. Have the two current methods adequately distinguished those members that have made valuable contributions toward CPFR's vision and goals?
3. What is the perceived value of the current honor of these programs in the organization?
4. What methods of recognition would offer the highest satisfaction to current CPFR members?

## **BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE**

CPFR, an 86-square mile fire district within the Pacific Northwest, recognized a major achievement in 1996 with the successful completion of a merger plan after countless months of effort and commitment by its members. Although a formal recognition and rewards program did not exist during a majority of this project, the necessity was not apparent, because the success of the merger focused on the survivability of several fire districts.

Reflecting upon the merger's success today, it pales in comparison to what remains in fulfilling the organization's vision of "providing service and solutions to ever-changing community needs." This vision is more ambiguous than the merger and will require greater effort and time before its efficacy will be realized. When a strategy is established, it is imperative to maintain the momentum by acknowledging short-term milestones of those individuals and teams that are responsible for its progress (FEMA, 1996). "Not only does a recognition system offer incentives for improving quality and productivity, but more importantly, it makes a statement

about what principles are important to the organization. It provides insight into the values perceived by the company's management" (Milas, 1995, p. 139).

CPFR has two instruments for recognizing and rewarding members of the organization that have devoted significant time and effort toward its vision. One is a commendation program which is included as a small subsection of its 12-page disciplinary policy. It directs all members to strive to recognize exceptional performance of another member of the department and requests written documentation for issuance of a commendatory letter by the Executive Director. An acknowledgment of the letter is to be included on the agenda of a Board of Fire Commissioners' meeting, and the recipient is automatically placed on the list of nominations for the employee-of-the-quarter award. Since the adoption of this policy in March 1995, there has been no record of a member receiving an official commendation letter.

The second tool utilized for recognizing outstanding members of the organization is the employee-of-the-quarter award. This was promoted by a grass roots group in the firefighters' association and was approved by the Fire Commissioners in early 1995. Its purpose was to recognize a member on a quarterly basis for outstanding work and commitment to the organization or community. The recipient is selected by a committee of his or her peers after reviewing nomination forms that were submitted for the quarter by members of the organization. The selected employee is honored by having his or her photograph displayed prominently in the foyer of the headquarters station along with an automatic nomination for the annual member-of-the-year award. Participation in the program was initially outstanding, however, the number of nominations has fallen dramatically as time progressed. In the last few quarters, committee

members have had to campaign every quarter for participation, and less than six nominations are usually received from a department of about 175 active members.

The foundation of an effective recognition and rewards program must be built on a values system held by all its participants, both management and the workers. “A poor fit between these two sets of values may have a vital effect on the practical results achieved by the plan and the participants’ satisfaction with the recognition system” (Bento & White, 1998, p. 47). Rewards and methods of recognition should reflect the current organizational culture; therefore, these programs should continuously be in a process of development (Wixom, 1995).

All recognition systems should be regularly monitored and modified to assure that its incentive value is still sensitive to the employees’ needs (Milas, 1995). Although the stated goal of CPFR’s recognition program is to encourage enthusiasm, motivation and satisfaction within the organization, as well as rewarding members for their efficiency and innovation, neither instrument has been evaluated to determine its effectiveness.

A common theme in the Executive Leadership Course, as with the other courses in the Executive Fire Officers series, has been an emphasis in fostering creativity and innovation in order to promote organizational success. One of the major obstacles to this creativity is the fear of failure. “Failures are punished out of proportion to rewards and those that do nothing are rewarded by default” (Rosenbach, personal communication, February 12, 1998). This could easily be inferred from CPFR’s, where its commendation process occupies of only 1/24 of a document, which stresses punishment and appears to be an afterthought of the discipline policy. The first step in removing this fear of failure is to institutionalize a valued recognition and rewards system that is executed in a manner that promotes a learning organization.



## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Desirability of recognition**

Fritz Heider, author of *The Attribution Theory*, concluded that people credit their behavior and successes toward personal factors while blaming failures on systemic causes (D. Meyers, 1996). The implications, therefore, are that when an organization experiences success, its members feel that their abilities and skills were instrumental in the outcome. When employees do not receive feedback on their performance, they become skeptical about whether they are sharing equitably in the success that they feel they have created (Nelson, 1994). Despite their disclaimers, people want to be acknowledged, and even a small symbolic reward is a cause for positive celebration and reinforcement of one's self-efficacy (Henry, 1995).

Increasingly, U.S. employees are feeling that their intensified efforts in response to corporate downsizing and increased job insecurity are going unrecognized, according to a survey of 2,500 employees conducted by Towers Perrin, a management consultancy. (Bolger, 1997).

The appreciation of recognition is not unique to U.S. workers. The International Survey Research Company, which specializes in employee attitude surveys in the UK, reports that although 70% of the workers rate recognition as important to them, only 37% are satisfied with the amount of recognition they receive (Syedain, 1995).

### **Perception of value**

Bento and White argued that "the effect of an incentive plan depends on its interaction with another strong set of forces: the enduring values of the participants" (Bento & White,

1998, p. 55). If the incentive does not override the participants' concept of value, then the impression of manipulation is conveyed, and normally the "carrot" is snubbed. When the incentive, however, is associated with changes in organizational values, rather than manipulation by managers for the sake of improving production, then the focus is usually on intrinsic traits—those factors that stroke our self-esteem (Bento & White, 1998).

Employers' hypothesis, that monetary rewards are desired, is invalid, because the incentive is usually not associated with the employee's value and their positive impact on the organization but merely their output (Darling, Am & Gatlin, 1997). While bonuses help with the daily finances and are frequently requested during contract negotiations, they rarely maintain their value as a meaningful incentive, because these monetary rewards rarely denote one's importance in the organization or community. "Receiving acknowledgment of success in one's profession and organization, while contributing to society, adds value to our existence" (Nelson, 1994, p.22).

"Recognition, in comparison, is very flexible, highly personalized, and based on an immediate response to an individual or group accomplishment" (Milas, 1995, p. 140). The value assigned to these 'no cost' rewards come from the knowledge that someone took the time to notice, seek out the responsible employee, and personally deliver praise in a timely manner" (Nelson, 1994, p. 3). According to a survey by Inventive Travel Executive Foundation, 63% of American workers, ranked "a pat on the back" as a meaningful incentive. In addition, high respect and creditability of the supervisor can increase the perceived value (Nelson, 1995). When one's peers single out teams or individuals that exemplify "the best," the employee's

status and self-esteem are inflated even higher, because they are the people that are able to validate the contribution (Burr, 1997).

Sincerity, fairness, appropriateness, consistency, timeliness, and the importance of the accomplishment all add to the perceived value of the recognition. When the supervisor nurtures an honest attitude of internal customer service, avoids favoritism, relates performance to organizational expectations, and rewards effort appropriately, while ensuring spontaneity and personal contact, the action will reflect an increased value in the recognition program (Milas, 1995).

The Federal Way Fire Department's recognition program is similar to CPFR's employee-of-the-quarter except it is awarded on a monthly basis. Their program, also, has suffered a fate of declining value by the organization.. The criteria emphasis is on outstanding administrative projects or achievements rather than other performance, and requires administrative personnel to identify a worthy candidate each month. The rank and file, however, trivialize the award with their disparaging comments about "the stooge of the month" and the defacement of recipients' photographs in the stations. The department's traditional awards of Firefighter of the Year and Officer of the Year, nevertheless, still connote substantial excellence and are sought by many members (A. Church, personal communication, May 26, 1998).

The Renton Fire Department's employee recognition program indicated a lack of concurring values in its system, also. The program recognizes outstanding efforts by a firefighter on a monthly and yearly basis, which is rewarded with a recipient's photograph displayed at headquarters and lunch with the fire chief. The esoteric selection committee and process alludes

to favoritism, which construes a lack of fairness and consistency in the program. Delays in following up with the plaque engraving and no choice in the type of reward reduced the significance of the recognition, as well as the department's appreciation (R. Myking, personal communication, May 27, 1998).

Renton's firefighters ascribe a greater job satisfaction when they are recognized by an immediate supervisor with a small acknowledgment either verbally or by e-mail. Additional significance is attributed to the recognition when a written memo is received, because the officer took the time to express the individual's importance to the team. The value of a recognition program is best reinforced from the top down, through the chain of command. Each immediate supervisor has the best knowledge about his or her associates' performance and their preferred method of recognition. Whichever acknowledgment is selected, follow up should be immediate and never presented half heartedly (R. Myking, personal communication, May 27, 1998).

### **Key attitudes and guidelines**

The foundation of any recognition and reward program is built around the unique characteristics and size of the organization. Each reward or act of recognition must be linked to the identified goals of the organization. The program should make a strong statement about the core values that are important to the company, thus employees understand the expectations and criteria, in order to be motivated to assimilate the desired behavior. (Nelson, 1995).

These values should be described in absolute measures of performance, both individually and as well as a team member. Recognition should not be limited merely to success, popularity, or accomplishments of non specific performance, such as good attendance. Appropriate rewards for expended efforts, though somewhat intangible, will

aid in removing the fear of failure and escalate organizational development (Milas, 1995).

Ownership in the plan is necessary for success, from maintaining accountability with the managers in providing consistency in judgments of performance to the inclusion of all members in the strategy and methods of the recognition. Without commitment and support from all levels of the organization, the guarantee of a balanced value system and meaningful incentives is not likely (Weiss, 1997).

Recognition is a personal experience. Although selection by one's peers and recognition by one's team and family is highly desired, the value of a particular award or recognition depends on each person's circumstance and preference. Some desire heightened visibility in the organization, some, increased opportunities, and others, a mere thank you (Nelson, 1995).

Whether the recognition is delivered in a formal setting or as informally as a handshake and thank you, every effort should be made to focus the attention on that individual's performance and share it with the significant people in his or her life (Milas, 1995).

Ideally, a recognition and rewards system should be unique to every company; therefore, it must be constantly monitored and modified as the values change for both the organization and its members (Milas, 1995).

### **Recognition and reward methods**

While people do not like to be greatly deviant, they are, ironically, alike in wanting to feel unique. This quest is not merely to be different from the average, but better than average (Meyers, 1996). This distinctiveness persists in the types of incentives that are appreciated.

Excessive efforts and dollars have been expended by employers on unsuccessful reward and recognition programs that have failed only because the inflexible system did not acknowledge individual differences (Darling, Am & Gatlin, 1997).

The rising popularity of informal reward and recognition programs over monetary awards has been due to more than economical factors. Monetary incentives that induce compliance are often counter-productive, because they rupture relationships, promote laziness in management, discourage risk taking, and undermine intrinsic motivation (Grund, 1997).

Studies have shown that merit raises, bonuses, and other cash incentives denigrate the performance by replacing one's satisfaction and pride in the accomplishment with cash. While monetary incentives may result in short-lived employee satisfaction, they often are viewed as entitlements rather than rewards for exceptional performance. It creates laziness on the part of both the manager and employee, since these types of rewards require little effort other than to hand them out; therefore, they become abused and decrease in value. Additionally, this system discourages risk-taking, because it seldom rewards an employee who has explored other possibilities. In a monetary incentive program, the giver and receiver relationship, more often than not, results in a power gap and infighting between the two (Grund, 1997).

Through the utilization of "power rewards," an organization may eschew the fallibility of traditional monetary rewards. This type of reward relies on empowerment, not manipulation, and work synergistically with intrinsic motivation. The focus is a release of people's energy to aspire to success in their accomplishments. Each successive achievement increases the motivational energy making us feel unique as we realize self-efficacy. The strategy in these rewards is to build a high degree of value into every reward you offer with recognition being the

most cost-effective reward. Low or no cost symbolic awards delivered with sincere appreciation will allow an infinite number of people to be recognized and energized (Spitzer, 1996).

Although the types of power rewards are only limited by one's creativity, they can be categorized as recognition, rewards, organization kinship, and growth at both a professional as well as a personal level (Spitzer, 1996).

Recognition can be as informal as a personal acknowledgment of an employee's special or consistent efforts to a formal event in the community; nevertheless, it must result in high visibility with the people the employee respects, such as family and work peers (Spitzer, 1996).

Blanchard Training and Development, Inc. in San Diego established "The Eagle Award" to recognize excellent customer service. Employees submit the names of fellow employees with a brief description of the exceptional activity. A volunteer committee screens out items that are considered an expected part of the job. The winner is surprised with visit and a photograph of the recipient is taken holding the perpetual trophy. The recipient gets to keep the trophy on his or her desk until it is needed for a new recipient. The photograph is displayed in the company's lobby on their main bulletin board along with a description of their accomplishment (Nelson, 1995).

Another company utilizes a game of Safety Bingo to recognize employees' efforts to follow safety procedures. Any employee observed working safely is immediately presented with a bingo number. They are presented a safety jacket along with verbal reinforcement when they acquire a "bingo." The recognition is personalized to keep the program fresh and fun overall (Spitzer, 1996).

ARA Services in Philadelphia organizes a day of appreciation for a deserving person. It includes a company-wide announcement, free lunch, banners, confetti, and other trivial accents that prompt a festive atmosphere (Nelson, 1995).

Spontaneous, non monetary forms of recognition are often presented as a reward. Rewards can be in the form of plaques, certificates, uniform ribbons, temporary memberships to recreation centers, designated parking spots, free movie tickets, job flexibility, and professional conference sponsorships (Nelson, 1995).

Cowlitz County Fire District #2 created a standard operating guideline that utilizes medals, uniform ribbons, and service pins to recognize exemplary performance, education, longevity, and career milestones. In addition, the department sponsors annual training awards and recognition events to acknowledge both individuals and teams for the time and energy spent on countless hours of effort toward organizational development. Medals represent recognition for specific acts of service, such as valor, honor, citizens service, and invaluable service in increasing the department's efficiency. These medals can be awarded to community members, as well, and are upgraded with bronze, silver, and gold stars for subsequent behavior. Uniform ribbons, plaques, certificates, letters of commendation, and complimentary letters are rewards for lesser acts and consistent behavior exemplifying department values (Cowlitz District #2, SOP, Dept. Recognition, 1997).

Cash substitutions in the form of points or buck certificates are another method of awarding the deed appropriately without associating the reward with an entitlement. These points are redeemed for business cards, annual clothing allowances, training opportunities, or compensatory time (Spitzer, 1996).



While public recognition is embarrassing for some individuals, their refutability can be defeated through a redirection of emphasis on organizational kinship. One's perceived value is associated partly with our identity as an accepted member of the company. Awards with the company's logo or name symbolizes the permanent value of the relationship and maintains the feeling of appreciation for a longer period of time (Wixom, 1995).

An employee of the Diamond Fiber Products Company proudly modeled a baby blue 100 Club nylon jacket at a neighborhood bank with the comment that her employer awarded it to her for a good job. Although the trivial award was a symbol of her contribution to the organization, it also increased her status within the company (Nelson, 1995).

In the Sandy Fire Department in Sandy, Oregon, members are rewarded for each five-year increment of active service through 25 years. The increments are recognized with belt buckles of increasing value, from brass at five years to 100 percent silver on their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This symbol of belonging and security has been proven to be a popular incentive (Hanson, 1994).

Participative management, empowerment, increased responsibility, cross training, and challenging projects extend a company's identity and value beyond symbolic rewards. Autonomy, flexibility, involvement in decisions, and greater authority demonstrate to the employees an increased trust and status within the organization (Weiss, 1997).

"Helping human beings fulfill their potential is not only a moral responsibility, but it is also good business" (Nelson, 1994, p. 192). The trend of a flattened organization does not offer

a steady number of advancements, as in the past; therefore, it is important that the promotional ladder be augmented with other opportunities for personal growth (Nelson, 1995).

Johnsonville Foods utilizes a personal development team and educational allowances to help their members establish a career path. Initially, the educational selections were broad, however, 65 percent of all their employees today are involved in formal education related to their careers (Nelson, 1994).

While assigning value to performance for future promotions could be viewed as subjective and unfair in the public sector, opportunities of increased visibility and responsibility are acceptable and valuable to any employee seeking a promotion.

Shimadza Scientific Instruments in Maryland “promote” their outstanding achievers to a special assistant to the president for two weeks. In addition to elevating one’s self esteem, it allows them a better understanding of the business and high visibility with the management team (Nelson, 1994).

### **Summary**

Everyone defines their value in an organization by comparing themselves with others in regard to influence and importance. Acknowledgment of the contributions by the company accentuates one’s value, inflates status within the group, and increases self-efficacy. The success of a recognition program is dependent on the participants’ perceived value in the method of reward; nevertheless, non monetary awards identify the achievement best while maintaining intrinsic motivation. Diversity of the reward parallels diversity in the workplace; therefore, immediate supervisors and peers are the most knowledgeable and respected candidates for confirming the member’s value and bestowing the praise. The organization’s

culture is dynamic. Ownership in a recognition system is only maintained when its participants are allowed to develop and continually redefine the program.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **Methodology**

The outcome of this research was to evaluate the current rewards and recognition program in CPFR, both through participants' feedback and a comparison with benchmarks of comparable programs in other organizations. This evaluative study included an attempt to identify other local fire department reward and recognition systems in order to utilize similar criteria in the appraisal of CPFR's program, however, the examples were too limited for any conjecture. The literature review, therefore, was the major source of information about outside organizations regarding perceived value and methods of recognition. Two local fire departments were identified as having an established in-house recognition program similar to CPFR's, however, both indicated the same lack of participation. Therefore, the information received during the open-end interviews with these two departments was used only to confirm the creditability of the literature review material as it applied to the public service sector.

### **Population**

A written survey was distributed to all active members within CPFR including fire commissions, volunteers, and other non-career personnel. The questionnaire was utilized to obtain information from members, across all classification of the organization, regarding the

desire for recognition, perceived value and satisfaction with the current recognition program, and preferences of recognition and rewards.

### **Instrumentation**

Questions relevant to the researcher's subject were incorporated into an anonymous district climate survey (Appendix A) that was administered to CPFR by Northwest Training Group of Tacoma, Washington. A software program developed by Praxis under the trademark of CorporatePulse was utilized to design the format and compile the data.

This researcher used data from scaled items 13, 14, 74-83, 86, 87, and 99-107 to answer the research questions specific to CPFR. Scaled items 13 through 87 ( Appendix B) were closed-end questions with values assigned to the selections: strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), agree (3), and strongly agree (4). A score of zero was given to the selection "don't know." Items 99 through 105 were closed-end questions that solicited information about the perceived value of several methods of recognition. These responses are listed separately under intrinsic value in the rewards and recognition section in Appendix C. The comment sections for items 106 and 107 were provided to assist with clarification of the participants' responses, as well as to solicit information not considered during the development of the survey. A list of these comments is found in Appendix E.

### **Collection of data**

There were 175 surveys distributed from June 15, 1998 through June 29, 1998 to all active members within CPFR to obtain internal information regarding value and satisfaction with the current recognition programs. There were 122 completed surveys processed for the summary report in the appendices. One survey representing a commissioner was not included

in the report, because this was the only respondent in the classification, which could skew the results by indicating board unanimity. Rick Hogan, M.S., Principal, Northwest Training Group, administered the survey, and the data from the 121 respondents were compiled by Mr. Hogan's staff utilizing the software program.

The compilation of responses was requested by job classification to denote any deviations between work groups, since the multiple groups function in different roles and locations. The classifications were staff chief, which included the rank of battalion chief and above; career officers, both lieutenants and captains; career firefighters and paramedics; and volunteer firefighters and officers. Administrative services included the human resource coordinator, payroll clerk, receptionists, and other clerical staff. Mechanics and part-time employees were classified as "other."

The summary report of ratings for items 13 through 87 was plotted on bar graphs correlating favorable and unfavorable responses for each respective scaled item (Appendix B). The favorable and unfavorable scores are listed as percentages of the total responses for each question (scaled item). The graphs for questions 13, 14, 75, 77, and 79 appear as reverse scoring; conversely, a favorable score indicates disagreement or strong disagreement with the respective statement. The response summary for items 99 through 105 is listed as bar graphs that indicate the percentages of favorable, unfavorable, and neutral selections of the total responses to each item (Appendix C).

All scaled items considered in this research are also plotted on bar graphs illustrating overall rating by the entire organization with mode, mean, and standard deviation defined in Appendix D.

### **Assumptions and limitations**

It was assumed that all respondents answered the survey honestly and were active with CPFR for a period of time that was adequate to evaluate the current programs. No qualifiers were attached to the close-end selections defaulting to the respondent's perception on what justified the answer. The author did not believe this to be a great limitation on the overall results of the survey, since perceptions were sought in the research.

An adequate number of respondents completed surveys for a 95% confidence level; therefore, the lack of response from the commissioners group should not significantly affect the results of the sample group. The volunteers and support services group, however, was considerably under represented when compared to the total volunteer personnel in the organization as indicated in the demographic section (Appendix F). The low numbers of surveys completed by this classification may not be an accurate representation of this group.

## **RESULTS**

### **Recognition desired**

Members within all classifications of CPFR strongly indicated a desire for departmental recognition with the highly favorable response to preserving a departmental rewards and recognition program in item 77 (Appendix B, p. 45). The mode score for this reverse scored question was two, and the average was 2.09 with a standard deviation of 0.66, indicating a disagreement or strong disagreement with this statement on the survey (Appendix D, p. 55).

Item 76 received a similarly high percentage of favorable responses about the need for program enhancements. Responses to this question, except those of administrative services, support the desire for recognition, but improvements were sought for the current program (Appendix B, p. 45).

The reverse scored results about the department's effort in promoting recognition show a 50 percent or less favorable response, except from the administrative services (item 75). The staff chiefs and career officers had the lowest favorable score with 33.3 percent and 31.8 percent respectively indicating these two officer groups were more satisfied with the department's current efforts than the other members (Appendix B, p. 44). The mean for the 115 responses was 2.62 with a standard deviation of 0.76 denoting selections from strongly agree to disagree (Appendix D, p. 54).

Research question #1: Overwhelmingly, the survey indicated that members of CPFR desired recognition in the workplace. In addition, a majority of the job classifications favored improvements to the current recognition system, especially from the volunteer staff.

### **Current methods**

The favorable scores on CPFR's current reward and recognition system varied considerably by job classification (item 74). The career officers rated the system 34.8 percent favorable; staff chiefs, 37.5 percent; career firefighters and medics, 42.4 percent; volunteer firefighters and officers, 60.0 percent; administrative support staff, 63.6 percent; and others (mechanics, delivery personnel, etc.), 25.0 percent. Nonetheless, the employee-of-the-quarter recognition program (item 80) received a 50.0 percent or greater favorable rating from all

classifications with a mode score of three, indicating agreement and perceived value with this method (Appendix B, pp. 44 & 46).

The issuance of a commendation letter for recognition was supported quite highly with favorable scores in excess of 87 percent (item 78). The reverse scored responses about knowledge regarding commendation letter criteria, however, were considerably lower, from zero to 45.5 percent, which denoted that although a majority of the departmental groups valued this award, they were unaware of its criteria with the exception of the staff chiefs (Appendix B, p. 45).

The bar graph from question 81, about recognition timeliness, indicated favorable effort by CPFR of only 50 percent or less with the exception of the administrative support group (Appendix B, p. 46). Overall, the scaled item had a mean score of 2.29 with a standard deviation of 0.76 and a mode of two, indicating a disagreement to strong disagreement with CPFR providing timely recognition in its current system (Appendix D, p. 55).

A super majority of members indicated that they felt appreciated by others on their team, however, there was a considerable decline of appreciation between fellow teams in item 87 (Appendix B, p. 48). In addition, a mode score of three on item 13 implied that individual accomplishments are preferred over teamwork as related to the frequency of recognition in these circumstances (Appendix, D, p. 54).

Two reoccurring points from open-ended comments in item 106 focused on:

1) a limited amount of opportunities of recognition for deserving individuals and groups during the quarter, and 2) favoritism affected the recognition process. Remarks, such as, “those that deserve it don’t get it, when those that don’t deserve it do,” “too general in recognizing one



person in a broad range of divisions,” and “quarterly recognition program does not recognize daily accomplishments” were repeated under item 106. Also under item 106, 6 of the 42 of the comments implied that popularity or favoritism was attached to the award (Appendix E, pp. 60-62).

Research question #2: While the two current programs are considered a valuable method of recognition, they are poorly administrated regarding timely recognition, limited opportunities for recognition, perceived subjectivity in the reward, clear criteria for the award, and favoring individual achievements over teamwork. Therefore, these current programs have not consistently distinguished those members that were deserving of recognition.

### **Perceived value**

The literature review assigned high value to reward and recognition systems that utilized immediate, personalized feedback for the accomplishment, while linking the achievement to the goals of the organization. Increased employee job satisfaction and motivation were the results when a respected leader took the time to notice and mention one's efforts and achievements, even as informally as an e-mail or a "pat on the back." Recognition by one's supervisor and others, that have direct knowledge of the contribution, increased the value of the honor. Insincerity, unfairness, delayed follow up, and an insignificant achievement that was honored were factors that would undermine the participants' value in the program. Responses from item 81 and comments under item 106 have revealed that these same issues have affected the value of CPFR's current recognition program (Appendix B, p. 46 & Appendix E, pp. 60-62).

The desire for recognition by one's team and supervisor was highly rated as being important to the participants, only below opportunities for growth (items 99 through 105). The respondents ranked value of recognition in opportunities for growth and training at 92.9 percent, by their immediate supervisor at 87.5 percent, verification by their peers at 85.8 percent, and a letter from administration next at 69.2 percent, which surpassed recognition in the community or with their families present (Appendix C, pp. 50-52).

Research question #3: Although members perceived value in the two existing recognition programs, the absence of an award presentation in front of one's team and immediate supervisor lessen the honor. An opportunity for peer recognition, along with an emphasis on the value of the contribution to the organization's development, could add significant honor and lessen a perceived subjectivity in the award. In addition, power rewards,

especially opportunities for growth, would communicate the strongest appreciation and value to members within CPFR.

### **Methods of recognition**

All survey respondents ranked their preference for recognition and reward in items 82, 83, and 99 through 105 (ranked greatest to least): opportunities for growth and special training, recognition by an immediate supervisor, recognition among peers, written recognition from administration, recognition among family members, perks and privileges in lieu of recognition, recognition in the form of preference points during promotional exams, and recognition in the community. Sponsorship to the National Fire Academy (item 82) held less value than a letter of appreciation under item 78 (Appendix B, pp. 45-46). The comments under items 106 and 107 included increased recognition by front-line supervisors, acknowledgment for extraordinary accomplishments that justified CPFR's mission (cardiac arrest saves, etc.), more symbolic rewards (pins, certificates, letters, etc.), a clear system of rewards, expanded opportunities for recognition, a dynamic program to keep it fresh, and an emphasis on positive reinforcement by recognizing people "doing the right thing" (Appendix E, pp. 60-62).

The literature review stressed "power rewards" to increase job satisfaction and intrinsic motivation through the reinforcement of behaviors and accomplishments that promote the organization's mission and objectives. These types of rewards focused on empowerment, participative management, increased responsibilities, challenging projects, and other methods that help every member fulfill their personal and professional potential. Symbolism appeared to be an important variable in the success of the rewards and recognition system by increasing the

visibility of the appreciation while accentuating the expectations for other organizational members. Cowlitz Fire Department's program of uniform ribbons, medals, and service pins illustrated important career milestones and accomplishments were highly prized by more than just the recipients. A preference between a formal or informal method of recognition did not seem to matter as much as having your peers and supervisor present.

Research question #4: Members of CPFR indicated the highest satisfaction in those rewards and recognition that resulted in opportunities for growth and training, followed by methods where recognition is delivered by one's immediate supervisor and recognition in the presence of peers.

## **DISCUSSION**

The respondents in the survey mirrored the literature review findings that people desire to be acknowledged by their professional peers and supervisors (Burr, 1997). A member's perception of their potential and value in society is enhanced through positive feedback. This acknowledgment allows the receiver to publicly attribute the success of the organization to his or her internal qualities and abilities as suggested in Heider's Attribution Theory (Nelson, 1994). This desirability for acknowledgment was displayed in the survey by an overwhelming concern for a recognition program within CPFR. With the conclusion that recognition is desired in item 77, then the favorable scores to improve and better promote the program in items 76 and 75 respectively denoted voids in the current program.

While there were favorable scores with the current CPFR system in both the employee-of-the-quarter program and commendation letters, a mismatch of values between administration and the various work classifications may still exist. Neither of the current programs fulfill several of the values identified in the survey and literature review: timeliness, opportunities for recognizing team success, recognition delivery by an immediate supervisor and among peers, multiple rewards in same work group or across several divisions, power rewards, and performance linked with the department's objectives and mission in the community (Spitzer, 1996). While the declining enthusiasm and disparaging comments about the Federal Way Fire Department's program appears to be a disinterest in a recognition program, it may instead be disguised as a value gap.

Bonuses and merit pay are traditionally not an option in the public sector; therefore, they were not listed as a choice under methods of recognition and reward. Nevertheless, it was surprising that money was never listed in the comments under items 106 and 107. Even the monetary value in perks, uniforms, and out of town trips was not a popular method (item 83).

The value of Spitzer's "power rewards" was supported with opportunities for growth and special training being ranked first in the climate survey. Intrinsic motivation, therefore, may receive its momentum from the desire to be labeled a winner in one's work group, which includes the reward of additional training and responsibility. These rewards, also, increase the potential of the member to achieve greater future success, which benefits both the member and the organization.

The employee-of-the-quarter photograph and a commendation letter provided valued symbols of accomplishment according to the survey, however, the presentation could be a

disappointment, much like Renton Fire Department's program. The receipt of a form letter in the mail or a photograph suddenly appearing in the lobby of the station holds no significance unless time is allotted to share the employee's contribution and the organization's appreciation with other members of the department. In addition, when the program offers only one opportunity for recognition during the quarter, then the selection committee must determine which contribution has more value, an act of heroism, a cardiac save, or the outstanding efforts of a person who functions in a support role.

The lack of team recognition in the current programs, as well as a poor perception of appreciation between teams is concerning (item 87). The core values of the fire department has been success through teamwork, however, the results do not appear to support it.

In its strategy to manage change, this research can offer insight for CPFR. As organizations have been forced to decentralize in order to operate more cost efficiently and respond quicker to the customer's needs, the responsibility, authority, and effort must be shared with all its members. The traditional hierarchical structure where the boss provides the motivation, ideas, and direct supervision are no longer reality. The preferred organizational culture in today's world of change is built on intrinsic motivation, the unique skills and abilities of all its members, and the willingness to accept and reward failure in the quest for success. To institutionalize this culture in CPFR, the fear of failure must be dissolved by recognizing the efforts and abilities of their single most valuable resource—the people that provide the service to the community. Whether always successful or not, the promotion of their membership, through recognition and opportunities of personal growth, will make the value of their organization more visible to the community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study confirmed that members in CPFR have a high desirability for recognition of their contributions to the organization and community. While the two current programs are supported, the recognition and rewards are limited and not fulfilling to members across all job classifications in the department.

Considering this information, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

- expand the scope of the current system to increase opportunities, as well as provide multiple awards across divisions, team efforts, and career milestones
- always link the achievement to the mission and goals of the organization
- institutionalize positive feedback into the organization's culture, so supervisors and peers, especially, are cognitive of the accomplishments of others, even if it does not always result in success
- acknowledge achievers in a personalized, timely manner that is shared with peers
- be creative in the methods of recognition and reward to include more symbolism and power rewards
- formulate a recognition team that represents all divisions of the organization to monitor and upgrade the program as cultural values change

The opportunities for change have increased in the fire service as diversity and technology have chipped away at its tradition. Therefore, the job satisfaction that was once realized in the glorious battle with the fire god is being replaced with the more prosaic endeavors

of today's fire service professional. The challenge is to devise a dynamic system recognition and rewards to reinforce this new paradigm.



## REFERENCES

- Bento, R., & White, L., (1998, Spring). Participants' values and incentive plans. *Human resource management*, 37, 47-59.
- Bolger, A., (1997, September 26). Workers seek their just rewards. *Financial times*, p. 11.
- Burr, S., (1997, January, 31). Use awards, ceremonies to motivate. *Puget Sound Business Journal*, 17, 27-28.
- Cowlitz Fire District #2, (1997, August). Department recognition. *Standard Operating Guidelines*. Longview, WA: author.
- Darling, K., Am, J., & Gatlin, R., (1997, July-August). How to effectively reward employees. *Industrial Management*, 39, pp. 1-4.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration (1995). *Executive planning*, (Publication No. NFA-EP-SM). Emmitsburg, MD: National Fire Academy.
- Federal Emergency Management Agency, United States Fire Administration (1996). *Executive leadership*, (Publication No. NFA-EL-SM). Emmitsburg, MD: National Fire Academy.
- Grund, J., (1997, July). The carrot, the stick and the zen of reward. *Oregon business*, 20, 30-8.
- Hanson, C., (1994). *Incentives offered to OR volunteer personnel* (Executive fire officers applied research). Sandy, OR.

Henry, S., (1995, April). Motivating the fire service: Positive versus negative reinforcement. *American fire journal*, 47, 12-17.

Meyers, D., (1996). *Social psychology (5<sup>th</sup> ed.)*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Company.

Milas, G., (1995, May). How to develop a meaningful employee recognition program. *Quality progress*, 28, 139-142.

Nelson, B., (1995, November). Motivating employees with informal awards. *Management accounting (USA)*, 77, 30-35.

Nelson, B., (1994). *1001 ways to reward employees*. New York, NY: Workman Publishing Company.

Spitzer, D., (1996, May). Power rewards: Rewards that really motivate. *Management review*, 85, 45-51.

Syedain, H., (1995, May). The rewards of recognition. *Management today*, pp. 72-75.

Weiss, T., (1997, November). Show me more than the money. *HR focus*, 74, 3-5.

Wixom, B., (1995, June). Recognizing people in a world of change. *HR magazine*, 40, 65-68.